



# The Honey Pot



February 2006

Montgomery County Beekeepers Association

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## Upcoming Meetings and Events

**February 8, 2006 7:30 PM**

Brookside Nature Center  
1400 Glenallan Ave, Wheaton, MD

## Upcoming MCBA Meetings

**Second Wednesday of the Month**

7:30 PM Brookside Nature Center  
1400 Glenallan Ave, Wheaton, MD  
March 8, 2006  
April 12, 2006  
May 10, 2006

## MSBA Meeting

Saturday February 18, 2006 at the  
Howard County Fairgrounds

## Short Course Location and Dates

Brookside Nature Center  
Tuesday, Feb. 28, 2006, 7:00 PM  
Tuesday, March 7, 2006, 7:00 PM  
Tuesday, March 14, 2006, 7:00 PM  
Tuesday, March 21, 2006, 7:00 PM  
Tuesday, March 28, 2006, 7:00 PM  
Saturday, April 1, 2006, 1:00 PM  
Saturday, April 8, 2006, 1:00 PM

Submissions for Honey Pot due by  
the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month. Send to:  
[Amazing.bee@verizon.net](mailto:Amazing.bee@verizon.net) or to  
MCBA, 26626 Howard Chapel Drive  
Damascus, MD 20872

## **President's Notes** by David Bernard

The cold start to the winter has slackened this January with temperatures warmer than usual and flying weather aplenty. Bees have been foraging during the warmest days and beekeepers are reporting foragers returning with full pollen baskets. With the longer daylight and the pollen stimulus, queens are laying and hive activity is increasing. Ah, soon we'll see our first drones of the year and we'll know all in the world is good again.

Ok, maybe I'm getting a little ahead of myself. There still is more winter ahead, despite the current warm weather, and the most dangerous times lie ahead for the hive. As you've certainly heard, more hives starve in late February and March than at any other time of the year. With brood rearing increasing, temperatures must be kept around 92°F in the brood nest, which requires a great deal of honey consumption by the winter cluster. The honey stores must be within an inch or two of the cluster, otherwise it is not within reach during cold weather. Armed with this knowledge, I encourage you to be proactive and keep your colonies growing as spring is in sight!

Thanks to all who have sent in their dues payments! I've been swamped with the renewals and am in the process of updating our membership list. If you haven't sent in your dues, please do so this month. We'll be purging our list in the near future.

Kudos to Marc Hoffman, who has taken the lead in our short course publicity efforts. It was Marc's effort that led to the honey bee article in the Feb 2 Home Section of the Washington Post featuring last year's student Kameha Bell. We have had an excellent response to this year's short course, with over 45 people enrolled and more calling everyday. If we continue to have such a response, then perhaps we'll need to rethink our short course program. Last year, the Nature Center auditorium was packed with interested folks. With the room so full, the short course starts to lose the intimate feel that I think helps make it special. Perhaps we'll have to move to a bigger room, hold classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, or one in the fall and one in the spring. In any case, these are the types of problems that are wonderful to have! Thanks Marc!

Happy Beekeeping,

## Calendar and News

### **February MCBA Monthly Meeting: Feb 8, 2006 7:30 PM Brookside Nature Center**

7:30 - 7:50 Seasonal Topics: Winter Inspections and Colony Conditions

7:50 - 8:00 Refreshment Break

8:00 - 9:00 **Soap Making** by Sarah Richards



#### **Spotlight on the Speaker: Sarah Richards**

I got interested in Soap Making by accident; originally I wanted to do a workshop on making cosmetics, hand lotion, face cream, and the like. The tutor was also holding a class on soap making and as fate would have it she cancelled the cosmetics class so I signed on for soap making instead. That was four years ago.

Much as with the other great interests I have in my life – herbalism, knitting, Tarot, Yoga, which I stumble across – I was amazed to find that I was fascinated by soap making and seem to have a talent for it.

I make about three batches of soap a year – well, there’s only so much soap that can be used or given away and soap does have a limited shelf life if it’s hand made. Each batch is a new ‘recipe’. I vary the ratio of fats and type of liquid to see what qualities these will produce: hard, moisturizing, large bubbles (or no bubble in some cases!) and so on.

The talk on February 8<sup>th</sup> will be a dry demo on the procedure for making cold process soap, some tips from what I’ve learned so far, and the use of beeswax as one of the fats.

As to beekeeping, it was a meandering path, started by a friend who told me her grandfather kept bees. I then read *The Secret Life of Bees*, followed by Sue Hubbell’s *A Year in the Country*, by which time I was so interested in beekeeping that I read a couple of beekeeping books and found that I was fascinated by all things bee.

Life has a way of leading you home, at least I believe so and it led me to MCBA meetings where I made the decision to keep a hive or two.

### **February 18, 2006 Maryland State Beekeepers Association, Winter Meeting** 9:30 AM Howard County Fairgrounds, West Friendship, MD

#### **Guest Speakers include:**

**Dr. Jeff Pettis**, from the Beltsville Bee Lab, will present “Varroa Control Options (how not to get burned)”, and will talk about formic acid’s efficacy and how to work safely with two new applications, Mite-Away II™, and Mitegone™. Formic acid can be quite dangerous, but has been approved for treatment of Varroa in hives (it also works on Tracheal mites); learn how to use it safely.

**Dr. Nancy Ostiguy** of Penn State Univ. will fill us in on the latest MAAREC research. The Mid-Atlantic Apiculture Research Extension Consortium is a unique program sponsored by five states to address the unique problems of Mid-Atlantic beekeeping. Research focused on our area is going to be very valuable to you.

**Dr. Dewey Caron**, from the University of Delaware, will update us on the latest and best spring management practices

**Arthur and Barbara Gruver** are beekeepers, farmers, and photographers. They have amassed a beautiful collection of honey bee nectar sources which they will show and talk about plants you can grow.

## News (continued) by David Bernard

### **Brookside's Bees**

We have been soliciting for volunteers to tend the observation hive at Brookside Nature Center, as it died in the fall and needs to be reestablished this spring. At least 3 individuals have stepped forward with some desire to take care of the hive. Once queens are available in April, we'll restart the hive (much to the Nature Center's delight I'm sure) from a split offered by Jim Fraser. I tried to shepherd the outdoor hives at the Brookside apiary this past summer and fall, only to fall behind with too much on my plate.

### **Meadowside Nature Center**

The naturalists at Meadowside Nature Center, off of Muncaster Mill Road in Rockville, have asked that MCBA help re-establish their observation hive and maintain it. So, for those of you who have yet to volunteer but always wanted to, here is your opportunity to share your expertise. Please contact me if you are willing: [amazing.bee@verizon.net](mailto:amazing.bee@verizon.net)

### **By Laws and Articles of Incorporation**

Earl Metheny has made a first draft of MCBA Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation. I've distributed them to a few interested people, but have not moved forward with the "formalization" of our organization. My main goals are to establish officers who will help the organization run smoothly, expand our activities, and grow in membership and service. If you are interested in serving on a steering committee to guide us through this process, please contact me directly by email, [amazing.bee@verizon.net](mailto:amazing.bee@verizon.net).

### **Membership Directory**

Several people have suggested that we publish a directory of members. Would one or two people volunteer to poll the membership and see if it is an acceptable idea, and then work towards publishing a directory? If the general membership is agreeable, we will need to decide what information to put in the directory, get each person's permission to be included, format, publish, and distribute it. If you are interested in working on this project, please call 301-414-2317 or email me at [amazing.bee@verizon.net](mailto:amazing.bee@verizon.net).



### **Website:**

Remember to visit our website, at:

[www.montgomerycountybeekeepers.com](http://www.montgomerycountybeekeepers.com).

If you have any ideas about the Website, please contact Woody Medina at [wmedina@pragmatiq.com](mailto:wmedina@pragmatiq.com).

### **MCBA EMAIL LIST**

Are you on the MCBA email list? You are only if you get occasional messages with [Bee] in the subject line. If not, email [Beemoderator@gmail.com](mailto:Beemoderator@gmail.com) to be put on it. The email list includes announcements of events and opportunities, discussions of the local beekeeping situation, and questions and answers about beekeeping from our local beekeepers.

## Hiveworks

by Evelyn Hogg

### Hive Inspections – Feed, Feed, Feed

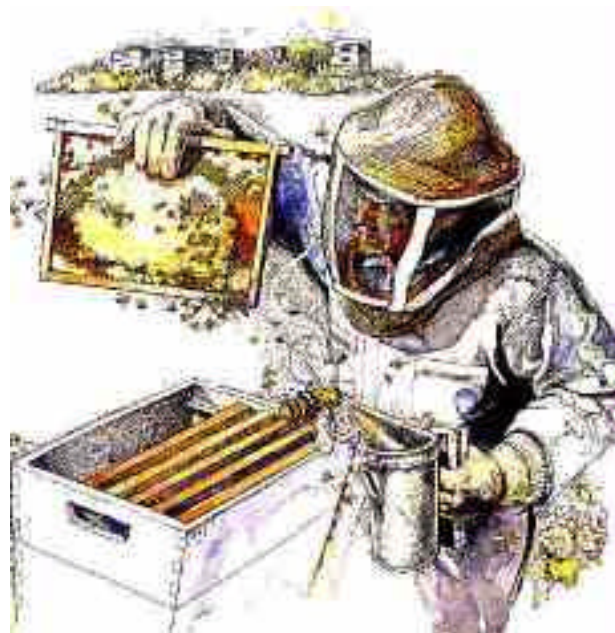
With the unusually mild weather we've been having, you should be quite concerned with feeding your colonies. We may still get a blast of cold and your bees will need all the help you can give them to make it through that time. This is especially true now that your queen has probably started laying again. The bees will use up any stores in short order. This might be the last month that it's reasonable to be feeding 2:1 sugar syrup. By next month, you'll be really trying to stimulate brood rearing and should switch to a 1:1 solution.

Although there have been reports recently of bees bringing pollen in to the hives, there is unlikely to be much of it this early in the year. If you'd like to give your bees a bit of a boost in their brood rearing, consider feeding them pollen substitutes from one of the bee equipment dealers.. At the hive, place the patty as you would a grease patty – on the top bars of the brood nest near the cluster (or wherever the greatest concentration of bees seems to be).

### Colony Increases

For those of us who WON'T be working away from the area for the next month or so (see Bill Miller's article below), it's a bit too early to start reversing, but not too early to be checking your stored equipment to be sure that your hive bodies will be ready to go on when the time comes.

Presumably, if you're planning to increase your hive numbers, you've already made plans to get new queens, whole packages, or nucs. If you haven't made splits before and will be counting on them for your increases, talk with another beekeeper, review the basics, and make sure that you've set aside time several days in a row to be able to work on your splits when the time comes. It won't be as simple as mathematical division and you may not be able to make as many as you'd wanted (or may have to make more to prevent swarming). Be sure you have a back-up plan.



### Weak Colonies

There really isn't a good time to have a weak colony, but finding one this late in the winter is pretty discouraging. You come out of the summer with what appear to be robust colonies, you think you've done what's right heading in to fall, and then, when you can begin to feel spring just around the corner, you find that you won't have the field force you thought you would. It always sounds harsh, but you really should not put a lot of effort or resources in to trying to save a really weak colony. Don't know what 'really weak' versus 'not too strong' means? Call an experienced beekeeper over to look at your colonies with you. Also, it's a good idea to review your management (talk it over with another beekeeper) and try to figure out what happened and what could be done to prevent the problem in the future. I've never yet met a beekeeper who didn't have the most unusual bees – the ones that stubbornly refuse to thrive under absolutely flawless management. You might have some of these. Or there might actually be something that could be done differently next time.

## Absentee Beekeeping by Bill Miller

For better than 4 years now, I have been mostly working field assignments away from my bees. On the one weekend a month I get to go home, I have many other tasks besides beekeeping. I don't have a "bee sitter" to work my colonies for me in my absence, so out of necessity I have learned how to compress 8 hives split between two sites worth of beekeeping into about two hours each month.

Fortunately, bees don't need all that much attention most of the time, but absentee beekeeping still means I have to accept a lesser quality of beekeeping than I would expect out of a Master Beekeeper like myself. For one thing, I can't do as much swarm prevention work as I would like, so I'm sure a lot more of my colonies swarm than would with proper beekeeping. If a colony goes queenless, chances are I'll find out about it far too late to do anything about it. What honey I do get stays in bulk pails, because I don't have the time to do bottling.

One of the things I have learned about absentee beekeeping is to anticipate the bees' needs and to be ready to deal with them. Feeding is a good example. I used to first determine if a colony needed feed, then prepare the feed and give it to the colony. That requires two trips to the colony in question, and I don't have the time for that over the course of a weekend. Instead, I anticipate whether or not my colonies will need feeding based on my experience and the time of year, make up the sugar syrup, and then issue it to each colony. I try to err on the side of caution (when in doubt, feed) because I don't want starved out colonies. I probably feed too much. I accept that possibility because I really don't have the time to fine tune each colony's feeding.

Moving on in the year, in late February comes the first reversing. Here I do look first because I don't want to break up clusters, and bees don't swarm in mid-March anyway. However, the late March reversing is pretty much a given. I'll also give each colony a drawn comb super in late March. There isn't much chance the bees will begin

filling the super before mid April, but again I'm trying to anticipate what is going to happen. I come back in late April, add another super, and then head back to work while my bees go through prime swarm season and the honey flow. If a colony swarms (and I'm sure some do), I really can't do much about it besides hope that another beekeeper finds the swarm.

My local nectar flow has been moving into July over the years, so I don't expect to harvest until my late July trip home. The honey extraction is the one time I devote more than a few of my home hours to beekeeping. The raw honey will go into pails for later sale.

After the supers are off, I add my *Varroa* control strips. I used to do this based on mite survey results, but again, I don't have the opportunity to do the recommended regular mite sampling. All the colonies get their strips at the same time; and they all will be removed at the same time.

I use the mite control strips because they require only two quick visits to the colonies, and the strips' time in the hive can be coordinated with my visits home. Last year was an Apistan year; this year will be Checkmite. I alternate strip types to keep mite resistance to the 2 different chemicals down.

While on the subject of mites, I do keep grease patties in all my hives all year long. I keep a container of grease patty mix in my bee pail, and replenish the hive patties as needed.

Things quiet down in the Fall, with just the expected pre-winter feeding. Hopefully, by then I will be home for good and be able to go back to proper beekeeping.

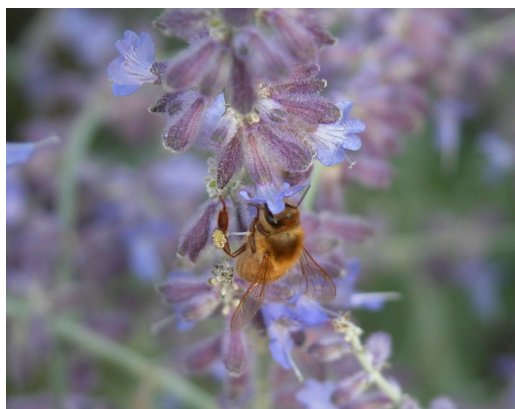
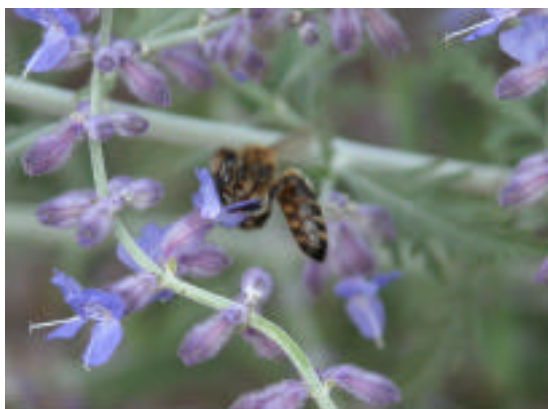
And as a last note, every month I pack my new bee magazines for my trips back to the jobsite. There, the magazines provide me with good reading, and I can keep up with the latest beekeeping news and ideas.

So, if your job requires you to spend long periods away from your bees, do not despair. You can still keep your bees successfully in Maryland.

## **Bee Forage: *Perovskia atriplicifolia*. Russian Sage** by MaryEllen Kirkpatrick

EAS last summer was held at Kent State University, and outside of the student center where the short course and conference were held, there were a few raised bed garden plots planted heavily with *Perovskia atriplicifolia*, or Russian Sage. Actually, it was planted all over the campus. Russian Sage is a logical choice for plantings in areas destined to endure a lot of abuse and receive little care. The honey bees from the apiary set up between the dorms and the student center were taking full advantage of the abundant pale lavender-blue flowers. There was little else available to keep them busy last August.

Russian Sage is one of seven species in the *Perovskia* genus. They are all easy grown, shrubby perennials. The plants are all strongly aromatic and have gray leaves that are thick and felt-like when young. The plants and flowers of Russian Sage resemble some species of lavender to some extent, but they bloom late in the summer. Plants in this genus prefer well drained, dry soil in a sunny area. They are propagated easily by both seed and cutting, and they will spread like grass to fill an area, choking out other plants if they are not checked.



### **Honey Crepes as per Honey from Hive to Honeypot by Sue Style**

A special batter which gives a particularly light, golden crepe with a delicate flavour. It can be used whenever sweet crepes are required.

Makes about 16 crepes, 8 inches in diameter and serves 4 people.

#### Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup water
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 cup flour
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 eggs
- 1 tablespoon honey

Beat or process together all the ingredients to a smooth batter. Leave to rest for at least 1 hour. Beat again briefly before using.

Brush a heavy-based 8 inch skillet with a little oil and heat. Pour in enough batter to just coat the bottom of the pan; there should be a protesting sizzle as it goes in and any excess swilling about should be immediately tipped back into the batter bowl.

Cook until the underside is golden then turn or flip to cook the other side. If you don't get about 16 crepes, you are making them too thick. Stack up as they are ready



**Dues:** Annual dues of \$15 payable to “MCBA” are collected in January of each calendar year. Dues entitle members to monthly editions of the *Honey Pot* newsletter, monthly educational meetings, and inclusion in special events, such as field trips, live bee sessions, honey sales opportunities and more.

See inside for more membership form and more details.

Montgomery County Beekeepers Association  
www.montgomerycountybeekeepers.com  
C/O David Bernard  
26626 Howard Chapel Drive  
Damascus, MD 20872

**Next Meeting:  
February 8, 2006  
Soap Making Talk**

